OPINION

BY F.S. AIJAZUDDIN

Endless winters

LAHORE'S smog-sodden winters encourage hibernation. It gives one a chance to indulge in reading, watching television, even writing. There are rare forays outdoors. To attend lectures, for example. On Dec 17, Dr Moeen Nizami gave a talk on the philosophy and literary legacy of Maulana Jalal Uddin Rumi.

Dr Nizami's brilliant analysis of Rumi's thought and works was reminiscent of that other devotee of Rumi — the late Dr Annemarie Schimmel. Those privileged to hear her speak will recall her style — she would close her eyes and then, over the next hour, release a reservoir of inimitable erudition. Dr Nizami opened his eyes and the minds of his audience to savour Rumi's inspired poetry.

To make a new friend in one's 80s is rare. A fresh acquaintance has been Dr Harold Bloom, one-time professor of English at Yale and New York universities. His interviews on television are pure gold, as he pours from the crucible of his mind molten wisdom on literature, religion, art and society. Each book is a portal, a Stonehenge waiting for an equinox of understanding.

Another 'friend' met on television was Sir Laurence Olivier. His moving portrayal of the doomed monarch King Lear reiterated Shakespeare's timeless relevance. That drama closes with these lines: "The weight of this sad time we must obey,/ Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say." (True then, even truer today.) Shakespeare strode ahead of his time, and, like Rumi, waits for worlds to catch up.

If Shakespeare is an addiction, Urdu serials are akin to a religion, with the same idols appearing in different avatars. In the torrent of episodes that feed the faith of devotees, one particular moment was worth them all. In one episode of the serial *Meri Zindagi Hai Tu* (you are my life), two young actors Hania Amir and Bilal Abbas Khan (our modern answer to Shakespeare's star-cross'd lovers Romeo and Juliet) connect, not on a balcony but in the unlikely tryst of a squash court.

The ineffable quality of their acting, Radain Shah's sensitive script and Mussadiq Malek's deft direction deserve to be remembered, for as long as Romeo and Juliet and their Shakespeare will be.

A graver distraction available on television is the live-streaming of hearings of the Supreme Court. It demonstrates transparency for the right reason, but with unintended results. They expose disfiguring fissures within the honourable court.

Similarly, it is the quest for transparency that guided the public auction of PIA's shares by the Privatisation Commission on Dec 23. Some viewers are still trying to make sense of the convoluted transaction and the concessions gifted in dower to the successful bidder.

These include exemption from GST on "aircraft, engine and parts induction"; income tax exemption on dividends of 15 years"; the postponement of PIA's dues to the Federal Board of Revenue of Rs26.6 billion, now to be settled in four annual installments.

The government has also promised that "it will not introduce another airline". Provinces, however, may do so.

It appears that the successful Arif Habib consortium has undertaken, in addition to the Rs.135bn to acquire PIA, to invest a further Rs116bn in PIA over the next five years, beginning with Rs35.6bn in the first year, tapering to Rs8bn in year five.

Privatisation adviser Muhammad Ali has disclosed that the government will reinvest Rs125bn of the disinvestment proceeds it will receive back in PIA, to expand PIA's fleet. This will be done in two tranches: initially of Rs83.2 bn, with the remaining Rs41.6bn within 12 months. This reinvestment will be done against a fresh issue of PIA's shares.

> Viewers are still trying to make sense of the PIA transaction.

Some may remember that two decades back, the government received PIA ordinary shares in return for funding of $150 million to PIA for eight new Boeing 777 aircraft.

At what price will this new reinvestment of Rs125bn occur — at par value, a premium, or at the last bid value? Ingeniously, the government, having divested itself of its majority shareholding in PIA, will again own PIA, this time as a minority partner. G. Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard* says it all: "Change everything just a little, so as to keep everything the same."

Most recently, following the high-level visit by the UAE president Shaikh Mohamed Bin Zayed, our deputy prime minister has disclosed that our government has proposed that UAE's deposit of $1bn be converted into equity in Fauji Foundation's companies. Our government has a shorter memory than the Gulf ruler. He has not forgotten the still unresolved dispute over $800m between his Etisalat and our PTCL.

When, Pakistanis ask, will their recurring 'winters of discontent' ever blossom into 'beauteous springs'? ■

The writer is an author.
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BY NASEEM SALAHUDDIN

A deadly threat

THE past several weeks have exposed Sindh's weak governance. On Dec 15, a large number of patients and their families arrived at Indus Hospital's Rabies Prevention Centre (RPC). A dog, frothing at the mouth, had run amok in Juma Goth in Karachi's Korangi district, mauling men, women, and children, as well as chickens, cats, and dogs.

The scene in the RPC was hellish. Frightened children screamed and wailed, bleeding from gashes on cheeks, lips, and eyelids, and torn earlobes. Adults had deep lacerations on arms and legs. Announcements in mosques called up more victims, and by the next morning, the total count reached 28. The team of nurses and doctors worked around the clock under the able command of the clinic manager, flushing and washing each wound with soap and water, infiltrating rabies immune globulin (RIG) into the wounds, and injecting vaccine into arms, ensuring no patient would suffer fatal rabies.

The pharmacy supplied vaccine and RIG without interruption. Each patient was registered, and demographic, wound, and treatment data were entered into the electronic database. All returned to complete the vaccine series, while many are seeing the plastic surgeon for wound repair.

Such episodes occur periodically and are reported in the press until the outcry subsides. Patients who acquire rabies from untreated wounds die in their hometowns, as there is no hope of survival. Nine such patients arrived at Indus Hospital over 10 months, and at least four more called from distant cities. These deaths could have been averted had treatment been administered promptly and correctly at the time of injury.

Our collaborative research in 2023-24 with Erasmus University in the Netherlands yielded a shocking result: we tested 100 fresh, unwashed, untreated deep wounds inflicted by stray dogs. Most victims were from the Korangi district. PCR results for the rabies virus were positive in 64 per cent of samples, while control samples were negative. This proves beyond doubt that the risk of rabies from stray dogs in Karachi is exceptionally high, and we are bound to see an escalation of rabies among people and in random dogs, which will further perpetuate this dangerous disease in the population.

No discipline of medicine owns rabies; neither the physician, surgeon, nor the veterinarian does. Municipalities, public health advocates, and animal rights activists are at loggerheads. Controlling this neglected disease is unlike controlling other infectious diseases. It involves a sentient four-legged animal that can be a friend or a foe. The community is frustrated and wants a rapid end to the population, while friends of canines want to see them happy and healthy. The two factions do not agree on a *via media*, and neither offers a feasible long-term solution.

There are caveats to treatment after a bite; the first is the lack of expertise among health professionals. In a rapidly changing scientific landscape, new modalities are overlooked, and obsolete methods are used. Those who are up to date report that treatment options are unavailable. These accidents occur mainly among the poorest, for whom purchasing the vaccine and RIG is prohibitive.

To further complicate treatment, a few high-quality vaccines are imported, while several untested vaccines enter through dubious channels. Rabies is too serious a disease to be prevented with substandard vaccines. Equine RIG, developed from horse serum, is life-saving but has not yet been listed as an essential drug by DRAP. Rabies Monoclonal Antibody, a substitute for RIG, is used effectively in many countries. We hope we will, too.

> Only a collaborative effort can control rabies.

WHO has slated rabies to be eliminated globally by 2030 — just four years away. It is ready to assist any country with political will and sincerity. GAVI offers a high-quality rabies vaccine at a nominal cost, but Pakistan has not responded to this generous offer. It is time to act now. I suggest establishing a 'Cell for Rabies Prevention' under the aegis of the provincial government and administered by relevant personnel. It should draw membership from physicians, veterinarians, civil society, animal rights activists, dog owners, communities, the pharmaceutical industry, and philanthropists. The debate should address vaccination and population-control solutions, as well as the intricacies of post-bite treatment.

Rabies has been eliminated or significantly reduced in several countries where governments have implemented targeted interventions. In Pakistan, where myriad issues beg attention, rabies is nowhere on the radar. Meetings with busy health officials are unproductive; funds are tied up in flood relief and vehicle purchases. Yet, I am confident that the communities' challenges can be mitigated through sincere, concerted effort from all quarters. ■

The writer is a member of WHO Expert Panel for Rabies.

FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

1976 | Fifty years ago

Federal rule in Baluchistan

QUETTA: The Federal Government, acting on the basis of a report received from the Governor of Baluchistan, has … assumed the functions of the Government of Baluchistan, a Press note issued here said tonight [Dec 31]. … The following Press note was issued…: "the Government of Pakistan has been keeping a continuous watch over the affairs of Baluchistan… . While the Government is satisfied that the insurgency launched by certain elements in order to resist Baluchistan's change from a medieval system … has been overcome, it is … not fully satisfied by the complementary performance on the administrative side.

… [T]he Federal Government has received a report from the Governor of Baluchistan to the effect that special measures are urgently needed to rejuvenate the provincial administration and suspension of normal constitutional provisions is necessary… . Acting on the basis of this report, the President has issued a Proclamation … under Article 234 … whereby … [t]he functions of the Government of Baluchistan have been assumed by the Federal Government, and … powers of the Provincial Assembly … shall be under the authority of the Federal Parliament. — News agencies

1951 | Seventy-five years ago

Preserve unity

MULTAN: Addressing a big public meeting here today [Dec 31] Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar, Governor of the Punjab, made a fervent … appeal: to the people of Pakistan to forge a united front against all external dangers, and to preserve their unity at all costs. The Governor said that Pakistan was surrounded at this critical juncture by enemies who harboured mischievous designs … and wanted to pull down the noble edifice which was raised by the Quaid-i Azam at a tremendous cost.

He added that if … any harm came to Pakistan the entire world of Islam would be put in jeopardy and the very cause of Islam would be at stake. Heavy responsibility, he said, lay on the shoulders of *Mussalmans* for the preservation of their hard-won freedom which was the greatest asset of the Muslim world today. …

He said that some people for ulterior political purposes were trying to bring about disruption among the people and were engendering the spirit of factionalism among them. He warned such people that they should give up their dangerous game, as the unity of the nation could not be allowed to be weakened at any cost. — News agencies

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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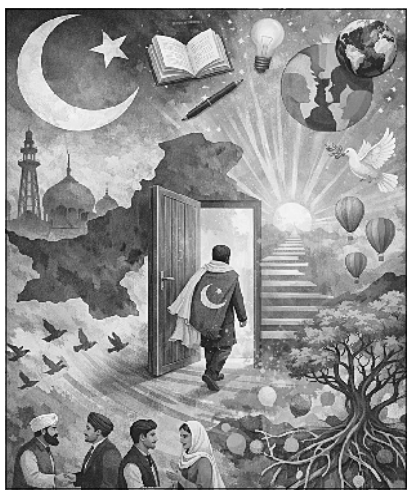
Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.

Enter the new year with newer hopes



AS Pakistan steps into the new year, the moment calls not for grand declarations, but for a sober acknowledgment of the forces that continue to hold us back, and the shared responsibilities that can still move us forward. Among the most damaging of these forces is the steady normalisation of intolerance and extremism. Over time, harsh language, rigid thinking and the refusal to tolerate any difference of opinion have seeped into public discourse.

Intolerance does not always announce itself violently; more often, it begins quietly in classrooms that discourage questioning, in social spaces that punish disagreement, and in narratives that divide citizens into 'us' and 'them'. A society that loses the ability to disagree respectfully also loses its capacity to grow. The new year must, therefore, begin with a renewed commitment to pluralism, not as a slogan, but as a lived practice.

Closely tied to this is the long shadow of terrorism, which has shaped Pakistan's recent history in profound ways. While the scale and visibility of terrorist violence may fluctuate, its deeper impact persists in the form of fear, mistrust and social fragmentation. Terrorism thrives where alienation is allowed to deepen and where grievances — real or perceived — go unaddressed. Combating it requires more than security measures; it demands sustained investment in social cohesion, justice and opportunity. The lesson of past decades is clear: peace cannot be imposed; it must be built and sustained.

One of the greatest obstacles to collective progress remains our tendency to politicise every national challenge. From education to public health, from security to social welfare, issues that demand consensus are often reduced to partisan battlegrounds.

This constant politicisation weakens institutions and erodes public trust. A nation cannot function when unity is treated as a temporary tactic rather than a permanent necessity. The new year offers a chance to pause and ask a difficult question: what would it look like to place national interest above political identity, even briefly?

Pakistan's young population is often described as a 'demographic dividend', but a dividend is only realised when invested wisely. Millions of young people enter the workforce each year with ambition, but limited opportunities. Besides, helping marginalised communities strengthens national resilience. Societies that invest in their most vulnerable citizens are better equipped to withstand crises, whether economic, environmental or security-related. Inclusion is not merely compassionate policy; it is smart policy.

The new year should not be framed as a fresh start detached from the past, but as a continuation with correction. Rejecting intolerance, confronting terrorism through social strength, setting aside destructive politicisation, empowering youth, and uplifting the marginalised communities are not separate goals.

They are interconnected threads of the same national fabric. To pull one is to affect the others. As the calendar turns, perhaps the most meaningful resolution the nation can make is a simple one: to see ourselves not as competing factions, but as shared stakeholders in a fragile, unfinished project called Pakistani nation.

Khateeb Khan
Kotli, AJK

Learning lessons

AFTER a large-scale genocide of Palestinians, the plan now is for the resistance to hand over its weapons. After years of unrelenting bloodshed, such a demand is unrealistic. But this is nothing new. During another white man's genocide, led by the Serbs against Bosnian Muslims, the latter, too, had faced such a demand and surrendered arms in return for protection under the wings of the United Nations. They had been kept in so-called 'safe area' that were attacked in July 1995, leaving thousands of men and boys dead. The UN machinery remained utterly helpless. This is a harsh lesson that we must learn from history.

International law is explicit on the rights of people under occupation. Resolution 3314 (1974) affirms the right of all peoples under colonial or racist regimes to struggle for "self-determination, freedom and independence", including the right to seek support. Resolution 37/43 (1982) reiterates the "inalienable right" of Palestinians and all peoples under foreign domination to self-determination, and acknowledges the legitimacy of their struggle. The Palestinians clearly have the right to fight to claim their occupied land back.

Angabeen Ahmad
Karachi

AHS Council

PROFESSIONALS associated with allied health sciences (AHS) play an essential role in every hospital, but their recognition and service regulation remain far behind those registered with the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC). While doctors enjoy a clear licensing system, pay scales and legal protection under PMDC, AHS graduates continue to work under unclear job structures and inconsistent policies.

Although Pakistan has an AHS Council, it is far from being fully functional. The council, which should protect the rights of technologists, is occupied by individuals who are either technicians or PMDC-licensed doctors, rather than qualified AHS professionals. As a result, the interests of the AHS community remain largely ignored.

In Punjab, AHS graduates enjoy a basic pay scale (BPS-17), which is a small but important recognition of their professional qualifications. However, in other regions, like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Sindh and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), there is no uniform pay structure or regulatory system. A technologist in one province may hold a master's degree and still be placed on a lower scale than a technician in another province.

This inconsistency has created deep frustration among thousands of young professionals who serve in anaesthesia, radiology, laboratory and physiotherapy departments. In the absence of a standardised national council actively working for them, AHS graduates continue to face unequal opportunities, limited promotions, and no defined service structure.

To strengthen Pakistan's healthcare backbone, it is vital that the AHS Council is made autonomous, transparent and truly representative of AHS professionals. Equal pay scales, licensing rights, and uniform regulation across the country will uplift the AHS community, improving key patient care standards nationwide.

Zeeshan Ali
Haripur

Issues of self-image

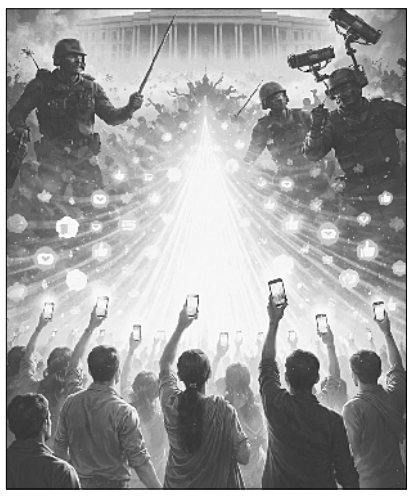
THIS is with reference to the article 'A tall tale about renaissance' (Dec 2), which talked of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's self-image as a Lorenzo de Medici, Michelangelo and Copernicus rolled into one. I would like to disagree with the assertion. Embedded in the Western culture, the writer thinks that the renaissance was a unique occurrence that took place in Europe in the 17th century.

To the contrary, there have been many repeated renaissances in the Abrahamic religions trying to bring back the past beliefs and glory. Before Judaism, there is the tale of Sodom and Gomorrah that led to them being destroyed. When the Jews were evicted from their 'promised land', the Zionist belief is that there would come a messiah who would restore the land to 'the children of Israel'. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's self-image is of that messiah, and he believes that he has come to fulfil the prophecy.

Similarly, the Hindutva belief is of a Bharat Mata that will span the entire Indian subcontinent, including Afghanistan and some parts of Central Asia, which will belong to that culture. Modi's self-image, as such, is that he is a reincarnation, or avatar, of some deity — the 'Hindu messiah'.

Dr Asghar Qadir
Islamabad

Enlightened citizenry



THERE is a popular saying that media controls minds, but truth, once revealed, cannot be discredited. Social media differs from traditional media in many ways, providing a platform to individuals with all sorts of backgrounds. People support a cause or a narrative if they feel convinced, but they can always go back and question the same cause or narrative when they get convinced by the counter-argument. It is a process of enlightenment.

This indicates that people today are more aware of who is doing what on the national scene. Any government attempt to control social media platforms, therefore, has the potential to backfire rather than work in favour of the government. Social media has truly enlightened Pakistanis about the political landscape, and they now understand its dynamics more than what the major players may like to acknowledge.

To make democracy truly workable in Pakistan, granting freedom of speech and debate without discrimination is essential. The relevant authorities may also play a positive role in this regard.

Hasnain Ahmad Thaheem
Lahore

▶ **OFFICIAL VEHICLES:** Official vehicles frequently disregard traffic rules, engaging in overspeeding, abrupt lane changes, and discourteous conduct. These violations, committed by government SUVs and sedans funded through public resources, undermine both road safety and public trust. The use of tinted windows and sunshades often conveys an impression of privilege rather than necessity. Such practices foster alienation among taxpayers who finance these vehicles, but are made to feel marginalised on the roads. Public service is a responsibility, not an exemption from civic duty. Senior officials should issue instructions to ensure that government transport is used with restraint and respect.
Zishan Ahmad Siddiqi
Islamabad

▶ **AI TOOLS' BOOM:** The recent news of a Japanese girl holding a marriage ceremony with her self-built artificial intelligence (AI) character is a grim reminder that AI is increasingly shaping human relationships. Advancements in AI tools have revolutionised the world. Today's youth prefer to share their emotions and feelings with AI-built characters rather than with humans to escape judgment. In this way, ChatGPT and other AI tools appear to have completely eclipsed human interaction. In such a scenario, we should make a conscious effort to take time out of our busy schedules and listen to the most vulnerable among us so that we may protect our society from the deleterious effects of excessive intimacy with AI tools.
Alisha Abdul Sattar
Lahore

▶ **SABZI MANDI ROAD:** The condition of the Sabzi Mandi Road in Karachi is pathetic. Along with the fruit and vegetable vendors, a large population of Sohrab Goth town, including areas like Gulshan-i-Maymar, Ahsanabad and adjoining localities, suffers badly from the poor condition of this road that is parallel to M-9. The relevant authorities should take notice of the situation, and immediately repair the road for smooth transportation of fruits and vegetables.
Syed Sohail Qasim
Karachi

External Ombudsman

Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is *Dawn's* External Ombudsman (DEO). His duty is to attend to our readers' complaints, and to respond to them professionally. DEO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is DEO who takes notice of any alleged violations of *Dawn's* code of ethics, and informs the Editor for appropriate action.
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